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ABSTRACT

The authors describe the systematic recruitment and selection procedures in the appointment of a Director of Education for Dufferin County, Ontario. The approach centers on the use of professional consultants to assist the Board in reaching a decision, providing a list of candidates to consider and detailed information of a reasonably objective nature on which to base its final decision. According to the report, the use of outside consultants should be looked on favorably because the professional educator has wider contacts with potential administrators than does the lay board, it permits, to a degree, the circumvention of the considerable political pressures to appoint an "insider," it provides some assurance of detachment and objectivity, and such professionals are aware of studies that provide information to guard against deceptive initial impressions. (WM)

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issues in The Recruitment and Selection of Educational Administrators: A Case Study*

by Edward S. Hickcox and J. Glenn Scott**
(December 1969)

Introduction

How does a board of lay trustees go about choosing a director of education for its new school system? Should it choose immediately from among its own administrators? Or should it also invite persons from outside to present themselves as candidates? What procedures can a board follow to enable it to select from a number of candidates the man best suited for the position?

These questions were frequently posed at a series of conference-workshops with which the authors were associated during the months immediately preceding the elections for the reorganized school boards of Ontario. There was general agreement that the single most important decision to be taken by the new school boards would be the selection of a chief executive officer--a director for the board of education, a superintendent for the separate school board.

The writers expressed an interest in this problem and met with a number of trustees to examine the problem and to stimulate thought and action concerning the vital role of chief executive officer in large, complex school systems. One outcome of these meetings was the development of the following proposal for professional assistance in the recruitment and selection of a chief executive officer.

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A Proposal

General Purpose. An agreement would be reached between the school board and the consultants whereby a program for cooperative effort in the recruitment and selection of a chief executive officer for the educational jurisdiction concerned would be followed.

The Program. In broad outline, the program would include at least the following phases:

1. The consultants would meet with the board or a committee of the board to determine the characteristics desired in the chief executive officer and to gather relevant information about the school system and the community it serves.
2. A brochure would be prepared outlining the criteria and qualifications for the position, accompanied by a description of the school community. In addition, appropriate application guidelines would be developed.
3. This brochure could be circulated to:
 - a. Individuals suggested by competent professional educators as potential candidates for the position.
 - b. Institutions that prepare educational administrators.
 - c. Respondents to newspaper and other advertisements.
 - d. Candidates suggested by members of the board.
4. The applicants would be screened by the consultants, and the board would receive the following information:
 - a. A list of all applicants, along with supporting documentation.
 - b. A list of five or six candidates who, in the opinion of the consultants, would qualify for the position. Appropriate evaluative statements would be provided for each of these applicants, with no rank ordering of the candidates to be made.
5. Interviews by the board would then be held with these applicants. The consultants could participate in these interviews, if deemed desirable.
6. The board (not the consultants) would choose the most suitable candidate for the position. If it seemed appropriate, the board could choose an applicant whose name did not appear on the consultants' roster. Alternatively, it could make no choice and decide to continue the search.

Responsibility of the Board of Education.

1. Participate in the formulation of criteria relating to the desired qualifications of candidates.
2. Participate in the generation of relevant information about the school system and the community it serves.
3. Participate in the preparation and circulation of an information brochure and a set of application guidelines.
4. Interview a number of applicants recommended by the consultants and others, if deemed appropriate.
5. Make final selection.

Responsibility of the Consultants.

1. Meet with the board to formulate criteria relating to the desired qualifications of candidates.
2. Meet with the board to collect relevant information about the school system and the community it serves.
3. Participate in the preparation and circulation of an information brochure and a set of application guidelines.
4. Receive and screen applications.
5. Provide the board with a list of all applicants, including supporting documentation, and a list of candidates deemed most suitable for the position. Evaluative comments for each candidate would accompany the latter list.

Rationale for this Program. The use of professional consultants in the recruitment and selection of senior administrators is widely practised in business and industry and is common in education in certain parts of North America. In education, large city systems and suburban districts have more and more relied on professional help for this important task. The reasons for the use of outside help have been well established by experience and have been reported in numerous articles on the subject.¹ Some of the more significant factors are:

1. In general, the professional educator has wider contacts with potential

¹Refer to selected bibliography.

administrators than does the lay trustee. In particular, there are informal networks of communication among university professors of education, successful practitioners and potential candidates, which go untapped if trustees rely on their own knowledge of possible applicants. While trustees may have a clearer picture of the applicants from their own system, their lack of knowledge about outside candidates tends to predispose them to "promote from within."

2. The political pressures and consequences of choosing one man over another--particularly an applicant who might already be working in the system--are considerable. The use of external consultants provides some protection for the board in that applicants will know that outside advice has been sought and presumably acted upon.
3. Trustees are centrally involved in the local situation and, despite desires to the contrary, may be swayed by personal bias. The use of consultants insures some measure of detachment and objectivity. At least, trustees can check their perceptions against the disinterested opinions of the consultants.
4. The role of the chief executive officer is a highly complex one, reflecting the complexity of the educational system itself. Studies relating to the selection of persons for such administrative positions have produced some knowledge that may be used by consultants to avoid the common practice of choosing men who look well or speak well or make an attractive initial presentation but are not really qualified for the position over the long run. Conversely, a candidate may not do well in an interview situation but may have qualifications and potential which, although not immediately apparent, would mark him as the most appropriate candidate. It is unlikely that trustees would have the time to secure the necessary background material and to apply this knowledge in selecting the right man.

Sources of Possible Consultants. The following are possible sources from which external consultants may be obtained. The availability of persons in these organizations would, of course, depend upon the policy relating to this type of activity. If a consulting "team" is formed, it would be advisable to include members from a number of the following sources.

1. Teachers', Colleges and Colleges of Education.
2. Associations of Trustees.
3. Professional Associations of Directors of Education and Superintendents of Schools.
4. Retired Senior Administrators.

5. Universities and Graduate Schools of Education, particularly those in which are located Departments of Educational Administration.

A Case Study.

This proposal for a recruitment and selection program was considered by interested trustees from a number of school systems in Ontario. Serious interest was expressed by representatives of the Dufferin County Interim School Organization Committee; this resulted in the appointment of a consultative committee by the newly elected Board of Education for Dufferin County. The following account describes the process by which the Board and the consultative committee cooperated in the recruitment and selection of "A Director for Dufferin".

Initial Stages--Establishing a Working Relationship. Elections for the new school boards had been scheduled for the first week in December, and the first meeting of the newly elected Dufferin County Board of Education was held on December 9. The ISOC recommendation to appoint a consultative committee was discussed at this initial meeting. Although the recommendation was not unanimously approved, there was enough support to warrant a tentative agreement by the Board to constitute such a committee, pending an appearance by the consultants at a Board meeting to discuss the program in some detail.

Accordingly, the writers were invited to meet with the full Board on December 12 to discuss details of the program and to make a final decision concerning the use of a consultative committee. This meeting provided the entire Board with an opportunity to interact with the consultants and to discuss problems related to this mode of selection. A decision was taken to proceed with the plan, incorporating certain minor modifications.

With agreement between the Board and the consultants, the major

problem was one of time. Other boards in the province, employing different selection procedures, were moving very quickly to appoint directors. There was concern that the most desirable candidates would be unavailable if undue delay were incurred. It was agreed, therefore, that the consultative committee would have its final report available by January 15, and that the Board could make its final selection before the end of January.

Finding and Screening Candidates. The first step was to organize the consultative committee. It had been agreed previously to include one member from Dufferin County itself, nominated by the Board. This member was Mr. Harry Sawyers, a former trustee from one of the communities in the County and a man familiar with the particular educational problems facing Dufferin County. The other member, in addition to the authors, was Mr. J.W. Singleton, Director of Education for Halton County. Mr. Singleton was well known in Dufferin County and probably has as wide a knowledge of school systems and administrators in Ontario as any other practising administrator in the Province. The writers had both been practising administrators prior to their university affiliation, one at the elementary level and one at the secondary level, and both had wide contacts in the Province through former students and through field development and service activities of various kinds. Later events demonstrated that the decision to make the consultative committee broadly based was significant in the success of the venture.

At their meeting with the full Board on December 12, the consultants identified the characteristics desired in the chief executive officer and gathered relevant information about the School System and the community it serves. In retrospect, this phase was considered to be a significant one both by the trustees and by the consultative committee. This interaction permitted the trustees to specify problems and issues facing the new Board

of Education and to reflect upon the kind of leadership being sought. At the same time, it enabled the consultants to become more familiar with the County and the School System and to sense the aspirations of the new Board.

Advertising for the position began immediately in the traditional manner in the newspapers. The advertisement emphasized that the Board was looking for a man who could provide imaginative leadership in the development of a modern educational program for an enlarged county school system. It stressed that the appointee would be expected to work cooperatively with a progressive board in the design and implementation of an appropriate organization for the school system. Of equal importance would be the ability to motivate and to coordinate the professional staff in the development and achievement of educational goals.

At the same time, an information brochure was developed, incorporating data provided by the Dufferin Board. It included a detailed description of the County, the School System, the members of the Board of Education, the position itself, and the qualifications that the Board was seeking in its chief executive officer. This brochure, along with a memorandum from the Chairman of the Board suggesting application guidelines, was forwarded to each person responding to the advertisement. Applicants were asked to provide information of a biographical nature as well as data concerning their academic and professional preparation and their professional experience. The Chairman's memorandum expressed the Board's hope that the written submission would reflect the applicant's position on the purposes of public education as they relate to the administration of an educational system offering an integrated program from Kindergarten through Grade 13.

In addition to seeking applicants through newspaper advertisements, letters announcing the position and inviting applications were sent

to more than twenty practising administrators known to the consultants. These men, in the opinion of the consultative committee, possessed excellent qualifications for the position but, for one reason or another, might not have responded to newspaper advertising.

Applications were received by the Dufferin County Board, duplicated for distribution to Board members, and forwarded to the consultants for examination. In retrospect, it appears that a more effective procedure would have been for the applications to come directly to the consultants, since the mechanical problems of duplication and distribution created several bottlenecks. Moreover, the information as it came directly from applicants without some systematic analysis would have little "comparative value" for Board members. The problem was magnified by the extraordinary number of applications. A total of sixty-six formal applications were processed, a number far greater than had been anticipated and, by an informal check, the largest number received in any of the new County Boards.

The consultative committee examined each of the applications carefully and extracted comparable data for each applicant. This included the address of the applicant, his present position, age, marital status, children, educational background, professional certification, professional experience in teaching and administration, and other related information. In addition, a minimum of two written references were received for each applicant. All of this information was collated following the application deadline of January 3, 1969.

Considering Applicants. The next phase was the preliminary screening of applicants. The consultative committee met on two occasions following January 3 for lengthy sessions. Each applicant was discussed in detail on each of the criteria that had been established by the Board. On

the basis of the information provided by written submissions and the committee's personal knowledge of applicants (almost all of the applicants were known professionally by at least one of the consultants), a preliminary list of twenty-four prime candidates was agreed upon at the conclusion of the first meeting. Eliminated were applicants who did not meet the Provincial certification requirements, those whose background and professional preparation were obviously inappropriate, and those whom the consultants felt would be unacceptable to the Dufferin Board, given the particular characteristics of the educational system of the County.

Prior to the second meeting of the committee, the consultants made every effort to secure further information concerning the twenty-four prime candidates. Telephone conversations were held with persons named as referees. Assessments were sought from persons who were familiar with the professional performance and promise of the candidates.

At the second meeting of the consultative committee, the list of twenty-four candidates was reduced to a final roster that would be presented to the Dufferin Board. This list included six candidates judged by all members of the committee as well qualified for the position. Three additional candidates were identified in the event that one or more of the original six were no longer available for consideration. The additional three candidates were also judged by all members of the consultative committee to be well suited for the position. The names of three other applicants were identified for consideration by the Board--administrators who were currently practising in Dufferin County.

Reporting to the Board. A complete dossier was prepared for each candidate on the final roster. This dossier included the candidate's written submission, at least two written references and evaluative comments

prepared by the consultative committee. Every effort was made to accord each candidate similar treatment. No ranking of candidates was made and none was intended. Rather, the specific strengths and weaknesses, according to the information at hand, were analyzed. This information was forwarded to the Dufferin County Board of Education by January 15.

On January 20 (in the midst of the worst snowstorm of the season), the consultative committee met with the Dufferin Board. Each of the recommended candidates was discussed at length. Since it was a closed meeting, the discussion was open and frank at every instance. Again, the consultants were careful not to favour any one candidate over another from the recommended roster, since a basic assumption of the whole process is that the Board must make the actual choice. The function of the consultants is to screen the candidates and to bring a measure of objectivity to the selection process. It is the elected trustees who have the responsibility for final selection.

Interviewing Candidates. Also at this meeting, the consultants discussed with the Board the next phase of the program--the interviewing of candidates. The consultative committee provided an outline for the conduct of interviews, including appropriate areas to be explored with each interviewee. At the end of the meeting, the Board decided to interview six of the candidates from the list of nine submitted.

Selecting the Director. At this point, the work of the consultants was completed. The Board now took over, conducted the interviews and, on the basis of its reactions to the candidates and the information provided by the consultants, made its final decision.

The candidates were invited for interviews within a few days of the board meeting; five candidates actually came for interviews. All of

the candidates impressed the Board favourably, and its decision was not an easy one. The final choice was Mr. W. Scott Roliff, an Inspector of Public Schools with the Scarborough Board of Education. Mr. Roliff accepted the offer and is now the Director of Education for Dufferin County.

Some General Comments

The authors do not wish to give the impression that this program of recruitment and selection was without any problems or shortcomings. Nor do they suggest that this process is appropriate for every school system in Ontario.

A problem, unique to this experience, was the scarcity of time. There were only a few weeks available to complete the program, and even this was interrupted by the Christmas holidays. Ordinarily, there would be more time for planning and for the actual work, and there would not be one hundred other districts seeking directors and superintendents at the same time. Coupled with this was the fact that a brand new school district was being formed, so that there was no history or tradition to call upon, beyond the limited experiences of the many small districts combined to form the Dufferin County system.

What, then, were the positive effects which lead the authors to state that the experience was a success and that it should be repeated in one form or another by certain school boards in this Province in future years?

The most obvious point is that Dufferin County has a qualified Director capable of providing imaginative leadership for the school system. The County would have appointed a director anyway, and there is no guarantee that the present incumbent is a perfect man for the job. Nevertheless, we feel that the chances for hiring the wrong man were considerably

reduced by the use of a systematic selection system. Without a doubt, the Board had more candidates to consider, and it had information in depth and of a reasonably objective nature on which to base its final decision. It should be emphasized, however, that at no point was the responsibility for the decision left to the consultants. The Board had full control at all times and, in fact, could have rejected the complete list of candidates recommended by the consultants.

From the consultants' point of view, it was a most interesting and professionally satisfying experience. It provided an opportunity to apply some theoretical considerations and research findings that have been available for some time, but not tested effectively in Ontario in operating school systems.

All those involved learned something about cooperation. When a genuine sense of trust exists, it is possible to put diverse ideas and expertise to work for a common purpose. There is wide variation in the backgrounds of university professors, senior administrators, trustees, community representatives and aspiring directors. Somehow in this effort the special talents of each group were used to advantage, and it seems evident that the results were satisfactory to all concerned.

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